

SOCIALIST DISCUSSION JOURNAL
TOWARDS BETTER UNDERSTANDING

FORUM

Capital—the Greatest Barrier

One of the difficulties in replying to F. Evans is that he writes on matters social and economic in a form of blank verse, a medium suitable for Macbeth but not for Marx. This leads at times to such obscurity of style that one feels there would have been no appreciable loss in communicability if he had written with invisible ink.

Whether he considers his FORUM contribution his *magnum opus* we do not know, but from what one gathers it is his final word on the evolution and outcome of capitalist society — although finality is a strange word in the vocabulary of a philosopher of evolution.

In my last article I tried to show that capitalism is a system of organized scarcity rather than organized abundance. I propose to present some more reasons why it has not achieved in the past, and I think will not achieve in the future, a maximization of wealth resources and uninhibited technical development.

In the first place, I see no evidence to show there is some economic mechanism which imperceptibly, remorselessly, painlessly generates ever-rising living standards to the point where sheer superfluity of products renders capitalism superfluous, and in effect reduces all human problems to technical ones. In spite of electronics, atomics, etc., wealth will never be produced like water except, as I said before, when the particular form of wealth is water.

While Professor Robbin's definition of economics as "a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses" may be off the beam, it is more in line with economic reality than the 1955 technical views of F. Evans. In substance, Evans's ideas have more in common with Major Douglas than they have with Marx. Douglas had his $a + b$ theorem, Evans has his $c + v$ one.

To begin at the beginning, it can be said that in the period of handicraft and domestic industry the law of value directly regulated the products of the market, and only at a later and more advanced stage of capitalism was the law of value modified into "the price of production." This was hailed by anti-Marxist writers as the proof of the great contradiction in Marx's theory of value, as he classically formulated it. It

was, of course, a contradiction, but a contradiction integral in all scientific and analytical method, denoting merely different stages of abstraction.

As long as the instruments of labour were but a fraction of the total expenses of production the resulting products were fairly evenly distributed in accordance with the amount of socially necessary labour embodied in them. The replacement of the instruments of labour through wear and tear made depreciation a negligible factor. Even where the instruments of production were on a larger scale because of the nature of the industry or undertaking, they were generally the property of the manor or locality, and so the expenses of constant capital were evenly distributed among the various producers.

But with the rise of large-scale, power-motivated industry, plant and tool equipment becomes a costly item in proportion to the current expenses of production. Capitalists who own costly plant can only view with considerable apprehension any innovation or new technical process which threatens to make their plant obsolete or obsolescent. In short, it would involve them in considerable loss in the writing-off of capital values. It is fairly obvious, then, that capitalists wherever they can will seek to prevent this from happening. The capitalists are not and cannot be prepared to undergo an immediate private loss for some future social gain. Capitalism isn't that sort of a system.

Because capitalism works towards conscious social ends — but on the basis of profit margins — the expansion of new productive methods is restricted within certain limits. To quote Marx to the effect that capitalism is compelled to constantly revolutionize the means of production is not the same as saying that there is an ever-extending and continuous process of new capital replacing old capital. As Marx pointed out, such is the self-contradictory nature of capitalism that "the real barrier of capitalist production is capital itself."

Another complicating factor is that an invention or new technical process does not always ensure that the increased productivity margin will be sufficient to

make its use worthwhile. Generally speaking new productive methods only yield their technical advantages if they are installed on a sufficiently large scale and can be run at something near their full capacity. Even this is a simplified assumption, because it leaves out the prevailing condition of the market. The degree of technical development of other productive units, the level of profit anticipation, the state of trade generally, etc.

Again, large-scale technical innovation cannot be undertaken by the small units of production but only by those large enough to have sufficient capital reserves. If, however, the large units of production decide to invest in new equipment, while they may become technically superior to their rivals they are at the same time helping to make obsolescent and finally obsolete their own older plant capacity. They thus become virtually competitors with themselves. Whether big undertakings will embark on what may well be a risky investment will depend on whether the anticipated profit-yield is sufficient to compensate for the anticipated loss in the writing-off of capital values in respect of their old plant.

Technical development in capitalism cannot be reduced to a $c + v$ formula, or *a priori* assumptions. It is the capitalist mode of production with its profit motivation that provides the momentum of technical development. The productive dynamics of capitalism can be sought only in a study of its mechanics. They cannot be intelligently discovered in the light of some abstract law of universal progress. The Marxist standpoint is that capitalism

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The opinions expressed in FORUM are those of the contributors, and are not to be taken as the Socialist Party's official views.

has laws peculiar to its own development. From this it follows that the law of motion of capitalist society can only be discovered from empirical observation and enquiry based upon an analysis of capitalism itself.

However, Evans's theory of social evolution with its utilitarianism — the greatest happiness of the greatest number — and its Spencerian overtones, must be the subject of a further article if it is to be adequately treated. I will say here only that even Evans must realize it is the difference of the laws of capitalist society from those of other societies which enable us to distinguish between one historical epoch and another.

To return to the subject: Evans's theory of the progressive technical development of capitalism requires for its support certain assumptions which cannot validly be made about it. In the first place, as I pointed out in the last article, capitalism has never been able to make a full utilization of its wealth and technical resources. It could only have done so under conditions which have never prevailed in the course of its development — that is, full and permanent employment and unlimited markets. That full employment and unlimited markets are indispensable conditions for continuously expanding technical progress can easily be shown.

Continuous technical progress could mean the constant and ever-accelerating replacement of old capital by new capital and the continuous expansion of the industries which produce the means of production and things subsidiary to them. This would mean that more and more of the power of society would be required to make the new productive equipment and man it. There would be no net displacement of workers because any redundancy caused by the introduction of newer methods would be absorbed in the working of the greater mass of plant capacity which was continuously being brought into production. There would, of course, be no long-term massive unemployment, because that can only arise when one section or sections of industry over-expands in relation to the rest, which means of course that technical development has been only partial and distorted. Further, such a state of affairs brings about a technical decline. It is pretty obvious that large-scale unemployment would not arise with such an overall expanding technical development — in fact, labour-power would operate permanently in a sellers' market.

In short, Evans's $c + v$ formula asks us to believe that capitalism gainfully maximises the available labour-force for the purpose — at least in part — of securing for all the highest material comfort. Thus, to the profit motive of capitalism must be added this other motive. I do not suggest for a moment that Evans has such a viewpoint, but the assumptions he has made about the workings of capitalism

require for their fulfilment the conditions I have enumerated.

In spite of the constant introduction of new capital, the employers would still have to operate the old and less efficient plant at something near capacity. It is true, of course, that under such conditions of full technical development some of the old plant might go out even before its useful life was anything like exhausted, owing to there being insufficient workers to man it. It being pretty obvious that employers would use as much as possible of the available labour force on the new and more productive plant in order to reap greater surplus value. Nevertheless, the products would have to be priced high enough to make it profitable to retain the older, less efficient plant. This presupposes levels of consumption able to absorb goods at this marginal price in ever-greater amounts, which means an absolute or unlimited market. It is fairly certain, however, that under such a consumption stimulus, new capital would before long become obsolescent and old capital obsolete. Under such conditions the scrap-iron business would become a major industry.

The capitalists would have a vested as well as an invested interest in the introduction of new plant, as it would enormously increase the mass and rate of profit by increasing the productivity of labour-power.

The only fly in the ointment of this productive elysium is that profits would tend to rise faster than wages and so reverse the process of growing equality between the classes. It may be that the capitalists would decide to spend more and more on luxury goods and thus bring about a shift, not only in employment, but in unemployment too. If the workers, in view of their favourable position, were able to demand more wages or lower prices, then the employers would have to tighten their belts by forgoing certain items of luxury — and invest in more new plant to restore the *Status Quo*.

These, then, are some of the assumptions which would have to be made if the full utilization of productive resources were carried out. It is safe enough to say that capitalism has never operated in this manner in the past and one would have to produce some pretty hefty evidence to show that it will do so in the future.

Indeed, the technical progress of British capitalism has, over the decades, been far from exhilarating. The Oxford Economic Papers calculated that before the war depreciation worked out to something like £12 per head annually. They define depreciation as a function of the amount of capital and the rate at which it is written down. They show also that there has been no spectacular rise or progressively cumulative growth in depreciation, which is an index of the rate of technical progress.

According to Colin Clarke, the biggest expansion of British industry (that is, relatively) took place during the last few decades of the nineteenth century. Now, whatever Evans may say about the future of capitalism, his assertions have been based on the progressive technical development of capitalism since the advent of the era of relative surplus value (round about the 1850s). We are asked to believe that in this respect capitalism has faithfully discharged its duties in respect of the law of progress. My own view is that F. Evans has not substantiated his claim, or even attempted to do so. Is it to be assumed that he considers silence to be his most effective retort?

There has been a great deal of nonsense talked by technocrats and people who regard themselves as social engineers as to the marvellous increase in production brought about by machinery. The work of Dr. Rostas, among others, on productivity should serve as a corrective to such people. To recapitulate what I said at the opening, firstly technical innovation generally speaking must be carried out on a large scale to be profitable. Secondly the marginal factor must be sufficient to compensate for the writing-down of capital values. It is this realistic approach that the investor always makes in his decisions about investment.

As I have also pointed out in the articles on crises, in the boom period of capitalism the nature of capital investment is such as to bring about, behind the backs of the investors, the raising of costs against themselves in a manner that cuts into profit margins. It can also be pointed out again that in any period of business activity wage levels not only rise at the beginning of the process but continue to rise, and this has an important effect on capital accumulation — hence technical development. In short, capitalism is not a social Meccano set which can be arranged and re-arranged in any arbitrary manner, but an integral and interlocking whole which must either be accepted or rejected.

Capitalists, of course, are not interested in technical development *per se*. Indeed, the expansion of plant capacity and technical innovation is against their current interests at times. A whole history of monopolistic and price-fixing practices bears witness to that. Just as the economic history of modern capitalism in respect of surplus plant shows that for long periods capitalism has not too little technical resource, but too much for profitable capital expansion. While men make history — including capitalists, of course — there is a whole series of impersonal determinants to influence their behaviour.

But even a series of determinants doesn't add up to a Greek drama or "a destiny rough-hewn which shapes our ends," or provide us with a *deus ex machina* disguised as the law of social progress. And even when Evans assures

us that we must achieve self-consciousness of a process whose direction and momentum is given, it is really a Hegelian afterthought. That is why I think Evans, in his wish to reassure us (and himself) of the necessity and desirability of Socialism, has invented a mechanism which is tantamount to a belief that the stars in their courses fight for us. I may add that in a further article I want to deal with the metaphysical and self-contradictory assumptions of his theory of social evolution.

I am a little astonished by it all, however. I find it hard to reconcile with the fact that for many years, on and off, Evans and I were in double harness in tutorial classes on economics. I can only conclude we weren't teaching the same economics — and so a fraternal adieu until next time. E.W.

"I can confirm as Minister of Fuel and Power that, as a consequence of the nationalisation of the gas industry, profit-sharing schemes for 50,000 employees came to an end. Some of these schemes dated back to 1889, thus nearly seventy years of industrial progress were swept aside.

The basis of nationalisation is non-profit making state ownership. Since there are no profits, there cannot possibly be any profit sharing." — Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd.

Manchester Guardian, 20/5/55.

Mr. David Low spoke about some of the cartoonist's difficulties with the current political scene, when he addressed the Manchester Luncheon Club at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, yesterday. An uninspiring sameness about the parties and political ideas—that was the chief trouble, he said.

Manchester Guardian, 21/5/55.

The question raised by Mr. Tuck was whether the majority of the tenants were members of the working class. "Fifty years ago that phrase—working class—was well understood," Lord Justice Denning said. "It applied to people who worked by hand, whether on railways or in mines, and who earned wages which were less than those of the rest of the community. Nowadays the phrase is inexplicable."

Manchester Guardian, 24/6/55.

Contributions to this feature are invited.

CORRECTIONS

In last month's "Marxism and Literature" article, "Chinese poetry for three centuries" should have read "Chinese poetry for thirty centuries." At the end of "The Work of Lewis Mumford", "he cannot conclude with saying that *Technics and Civilisation* is a good book" should have been "he cannot conclude without saying, &c." It makes all the difference.

Cuttings

The California Legislature has recognized television as a "necessity" in giving final passage to a Bill which would prevent creditors in a bankruptcy action from placing an attachment on the family television set.

The Observer, 29/5/55.

* * *

Ways in which freedom of the Press can be imperilled are outlined in a report to be presented to the annual meeting of the Commonwealth Press Union . . . "Pressure is sometimes exercised by withholding official advertising; by denying information to critical newspapers while favouring others; by claiming doubtful breaches of privilege; by subsidizing news agencies; by discriminatory rationing of newsprint; by promoting international Press conventions; by organizing strikes by puppet trade unions; by insisting upon revelation of the source of information that is politically embarrassing; by withdrawal of registration for newspaper postage; by restriction of reporting facilities to journalists on a police register."

The Observer, 5/6/55.

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Taking the Whitsun holidays and a fare increase into consideration, London Transport had calculated that it would receive about £3 millions during the first week of the railway strike. In fact its receipts were £3,139,000. The buses earned an extra £99,000 and the Underground railways £40,000.

Manchester Guardian, 18/6/55.

* * *

The International Labour Conference is having difficulty in starting its proper work in committees because of the credentials problem raised by the majority of employers.

M. Pierre Waline, the spokesman for the employers from non-communist countries, said . . . that his group had decided on this occasion not to lodge a formal challenge to the "credentials" of the Communist employers since the question of who are genuine employers' and workers' delegates was now being considered by a fact-finding committee set up for this purpose.

Manchester Guardian, 3/6/55.

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An air-to-air missile with an atomic warhead was exploded six miles above the Nevada proving-grounds this morning . . . The joint announcement said that it was capable of destroying an entire formation of aircraft within a radius of at least half a mile.

Manchester Guardian, 7/4/55.

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Thunderflashes, the fireworks which make a big bang, are to be banned after November 5.

Manchester Guardian, 23/6/55.

Editorial

With two more issues, FORUM will have completed three years of publication; and, as they say on the election platforms, this is no time for complacency. Indeed, far from it. Readers who follow the Executive Committee reports will have gleaned something of the seriousness of the position. Here it is.

FORUM loses, and has lost for some time, £7 each month; that is, £84 a year. In itself, that is grave. The special seriousness, however, is that FORUM has been pledged from the beginning to be self-supporting and not be subsidized from the Socialist Party's funds.

Various answers to the difficulty have been suggested: duplicating FORUM, making it smaller, running a special fund. We have — temporarily, at any rate — withdrawn the "Outline" cartoons to effect a small saving. The fact remains that, unless our income rises considerably, FORUM will become either smaller or dearer.

The present committee — Harry Waite, Ted Wilmott, Albert Ivimey and Bob Coster — took over four months ago knowing how things stood; knowing, for example, that a large section of the Party had come to regard FORUM as a liability. With good reason too. We were confident that we could make it a paper for the Party to value and be proud of. WE STILL ARE.

We believe there is scope for FORUM as a medium for Socialist education, information and instructive discussion. The need for it is strengthened by the lack of any economics or other classes at the present time. Those are the lines on which we have worked so far. Some members have told us FORUM has improved; others perhaps are reserving their opinions. This issue contains an experienced speaker's contribution on public speaking; next month we shall have an article reviewing Labour Party theories in the light of McNair's new book on Maxton; shortly we hope to publish a contribution on Imperialism.

We do not want FORUM to become dearer, because in our view it is already dear at sixpence for eight pages. We have stated our aims. What we need is the backing of every member to restore the sales to what they should be. We ask everyone who reads this to do what he can.

Contributions to "Forum" should be addressed to the Internal Party Journal Committee, at Head Office. If they cannot be typed, articles should be written in ink on one side of the paper only, and contributors are asked to give their addresses and the names of their Branches. Contributors intending series of articles should give an indication of the scope of their series, not send merely a first article.

MARXISM and LITERATURE: 3

"In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch."
MARX.

In modern story-writing, characterization is all-important: the popularity of some writers stands in direct ratio to the portrait galleries which they produce. The manner of it has changed a good deal. Nineteenth-century writers began with long descriptions of their people, so there should be no mistaking the good and the bad; the modern idiom is to have characters unfold in action, dialogue and introspection. Whichever way it comes, the characters have to "live." People want to know about people.

Literary historians usually treat this as something in the development of the art of writing, overlooking that art is a product of social life—and, as Plekhanov remarks, "To understand in what manner art reflects life, one must understand the mechanism of the latter." Character came to the fore in literature at the same time as the changing mode of production threw emphasis on the individual's importance. Or, as Kautsky put it: "With commodity production, when goods are produced by private producers independently of each other, happiness and pleasure, and the conditions necessary thereto, become a private matter." (*Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*).

That is how things began to be in Geoffrey Chaucer's time; that is why the *Canterbury Tales* were about people, not merely happenings. "It is," says Nevill Coghill about the Prologue to the *Tales*, "the concise portrait of an entire nation" — an over-statement, but it will do to show the point. The tales are part of the nature of the tellers: the ripe insight of the genial, gap-toothed Wife of Bath, the red-necked Miller's uproarious earthiness, and so on. For similarly broad, keen characterization you have to go back to Gaius Petronius of Rome — that is, to the earlier time when there was commodity production.

This is not a history of writers. It is a history of literature as part of society — if you like, as part of the relations of production. The author of the *Canterbury Tales* lived from 1340 to 1400. In those sixty years there was a great agricultural depression, caused by the export of grain from Eastern Germany and spread all over western Europe — the earliest slump. The Company of the Staple was granted a monopoly of trade in wool, wrestling with the Italian and Hansard traders for control of the European market. And in 1453 French artillery annihilated an army of English bowmen in Gascony, bringing

down the final curtain on the age of chivalry.

Consider those facts, and consider Chaucer further beside some of his contemporaries. In the Italian city-states there were Boccaccio and Dante. The one, writing his hundred tales of adultery to entertain the ladies of a ruling class which had become a leisured class; the other painting mediaeval popular theology as clearly as Michelangelo and as terrifyingly as the Inquisition, consigning his political enemies to hell and idealizing the chastity of Beatrice while he knocked out four children by his earthly wife. Dante, in fact, comes nearer than any writer to displaying the mind of the Catholic Middle Ages. It is worth quoting in entirety G. A. Borgese's incisive statement of what the *Divine Comedy* is all about:

"As conservative as his cosmology — the Platonic Aristotelian — Ptolemaic pocket-size universe, geocentric, custom-made *ad usum delphini*, for the use of man, rotating its numbered and concentric heavens around his unbudging home—in his ancestral geography — the earth admittedly a globe, but inhabited on our hemisphere only, with no denizens at the antipodes except for a South Sea island, his own visionary discovery, where the disembodied souls of pardonable sinners climb for years or centuries of torments through the terraces of Purgatory to the plateau which was Adam's paradise, thence to soar to God's; as inherited as his penal code, spelled out in retaliatory retributions, are his ethics and economics, his chronology and history, all, root and branch, his systematic philosophy. Vices and virtues are tabulated in a symmetry combining Aristotle and Aquinas, classicism and catechism. Pride (which we call primacy), envy (which we call competition), avarice (which we call the profit motive), are the three spark-plugs of hell fire. Production is for use, not gain; cursed is the florin (which we call dollar); acquisitiveness is subversiveness."

One other name from this period needs to be considered: William Langland, author of *The Vision of Piers Plowman*. Put Langland beside Chaucer, and you have a view of the actual state of the relations of production in England a little before 1400. Langland was a countryman (he wrote in west midland dialect), a churchman, a man of moderate substance in the feudal scheme of things. He wrote

fervently of the decay of mediaeval life, pleading for the rural poor and complaining of abuses of every kind. In his short life came the Black Death, the Peasants' Revolt, and the denial of Catholic teaching by Wycliffe and his followers. Because Langland belonged to it, he lamented the passing of an epoch. Chaucer, the diplomat and the Port of London official, belonged to the world just beginning, the world of trade and individualism. Their lives coincided, they wrote with similar skill: what was different was their social consciousness.

It is possible, with a little time and a glossary, to read *The Canterbury Tales* and *Piers Plowman* as they were written (though there is no reason why anybody but the very scholarly should not prefer present-day versions). The English language had evolved into something not too much different from ours — the evolutionary force being the gradual formation of capitalism's political unit, the nation-state. Bear in mind that printing was not yet invented: these poems were read aloud to small or large gatherings and afterwards copied out by scribes. The reading-aloud was responsible more than anything else for their episodic construction and their style: they had to be clear, and they had to be polite to their hearers, too.

This was the age of ballads, too, conveying, as A. R. Myers says in *England in the Late Middle Ages*, "the disorder and lack of just governance in the land, the popular hatred of oppressive sheriffs and wealthy prelates, the general respect for the noble rank and also for the rising yeomen class, the faith that the king will do justice and set all right." Ballads were means of communication when news was eagerly sought, passed on in simple jingling verse and shaped according to local or national feeling for a hero or an event. Thus, Robin Hood went the rounds in Chaucer's day, and every happening from a battle to a crowning had a ballad. Another fourteenth-century by-product was the religious verse—carols and hymns, composed to order as wealthy merchants began the series of innumerable foundations of chapels and schools for the glory of God and the accumulation of capital.

And what about prose? It was there: Malory used it for the last and most fluent of the King Arthur epics. It was gradually increasing in volume as travel, stimulated by trade, and theology, stimulated by resistance to the Church ownership of land,

and science, stimulated by everything which was happening, began to be written up afresh. In Italy, it was the medium of Castiglione's *The Courtier* and Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the former omitting and the latter expounding, as Ford Madox Ford says, "that the tranquil and beautiful life was supported on the dagger of the assassin and the culverins and morgensterns of mercenaries"; and Benvenuto Cellini's *Autobiography*, which, as was recently remarked to this writer, explains the city-states better than do most historians.

So, passing over the mediocrities and the minor phenomena of the fifteenth century, one inevitably comes to the celebrated Elizabethan age: the beginning — spectacular, as beginnings often are — of the modern era. Consider it as stretching from a little after 1500 to a little before 1700: that will go farther towards including all that went into making it what it was, and free it from the fatuous association with a particular monarch. It is necessary to disburden oneself of other illusions too. The sixteenth century was not an era of universal prosperity and gold-paved streets; it was, in fact, the age of beggars — the abject forebears of the industrial working class, about whom this writer delivered himself in the *Socialist Standard* in November, 1953, and does not propose to recapitulate now. Nor is it true that every mother's son clamoured for adventure on the high seas: the colonial ships had to be filled largely with convicts and bums and made up from the gaols of France.

What is true is that trading and industrial fortunes came quickly. The school where this writer received part of his education was founded, like innumerable others, by a London merchant who had made his fortune by 1527. Apart from these minor monuments to accumulation, the southern countryside became dotted with comfortable, red-brick-and-gable houses (graceful enough to be still copied in piecrust in modern suburbia). The first deep mines were sunk, the first clothing factories set up, the battle with Spain for the precious metals and the trade routes was fought and won . . . and, since the many streams of sixteenth-century literature have here to be intercepted at some point, the parallels of England and Spain provide as good as any.

Spanish literature shone as brightly, had as many glittering exponents, as that of England in this age of commercial and cultural gold. The likenesses, indeed, are so startling as to refute by themselves those who deny the relationship of art and economic life. Thus, there was the sudden rapid growth of the theatre. Not of the drama, for that had gone on all through the Middle Ages, in churches and market-places, on village greens and inn-yards: the theatre, its rise establishing almost the final separation of artist from people — where the paid writer and the paid per-

former showed their specialized skill across the barrier now marked with foot-lights. In Seville and Toledo and London, people flocked to this new phenomenon; while London produced Shakespeare, Spain produced Lope de Vega, and the adoration of each still goes on. "Spain had stage stars almost as numerous as those of the cinema today; the number of her theatres at about the date when the theatres were suppressed in England was given as three hundred, and before the first half of the century had passed, scenery and stage devices had there reached a stage that was not to be attained by the rest of Europe for a couple of hundred years or so" (*The March of Literature*).

Again, there was the picaresque story. Beginning in Spain, named after the pizarro, the likeable spiv who was its hero, it was the reading public's prime favourite in Elizabethan England. Greatest of all the picaresque writers was Quevedo, to whom half the low stories told in Spain are still attributed (those who have never read *The Great Rogue* have missed something. The ragged, workless hordes who infested all western Europe, products of its economic development, provided ample material. Some begged, some stole, some starved, some became spivs; or, "spiv" being a nineteenth-century word, "coney-catchers" — coney was Elizabethan for a rabbit or greenhorn. There were Robert Greene, who wrote a whole series about coney-catchers; John Awdely, who wrote *The Fraternity of Vagabonds*; Thomas Harman, author of *Caveat for Common Cursitors*; ever so many more, beginning the long line of those who have found journalistic capital in the figure who, perhaps more than any other, symbolizes working-class disillusionment.

Again, there were the first novels — works of "feigned history" aimed at pleasing people with leisure to spare. In Spain, there was Quevedo, and a little later there was Cervantes. In England, two attempts were made. One, Thomas Nash's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, was a longer picaresque story; the other, John Lyly's *Euphues*, was the very first attempt in this genre. *Euphues* is a display of "fine writing": flashy and extravagant in its language, weighed down with gargantuan florid sentences and fantastic botanical similes, creating doubt that with all those words the author will say anything in the end. It was popular for perhaps fifteen years before it went the way it deserved, leaving behind the word "euphuism" or "euphemism" as a synonym for long-windedness. And that happened in Spain, too; they have the word "gongorism" for just the same thing, deriving it from a writer named Gongora who flourished, in his way, at nearly the same time.

It is possible to trace various streams in English literature and watch their
(Continued on page 152)

HINTS on PUBLIC SPEAKING

It is hoped that these notes will help those members who desire to speak for the Party — and, maybe, inspire some to try.

No originality is claimed: most of the notes have been taken from the various works on the subject and adapted to Party needs. They of necessity mainly deal with indoor speaking, although it is hoped later to give some hints on outdoor work. The writer proposes also to suggest some ways of improving the use of the voice, by an examination of the instrument which produces it.

The method of preparing notes will be worth studying by those who are speakers, as well as by those who would be. For the most part, however, these will be hints. I am presuming readers who are prepared to use them; maybe I am too presumptuous, but let us hope not.

KNOW YOUR SUBJECT.

This advice may seem so obvious as to be scarcely worth the giving. I am, however, writing from personal experience, and am not going to neglect the important because its statement may amount to a truism.

At least half of the bad speaking one hears is due to violation of this fundamental principle. One may say it is the unforgivable sin for a Party speaker not to know the Party case and how to apply it!

The man who is full of his subject seldom exhibits nervousness and seldom fails to grip his audience. Because he knows he cannot be pulled up over inaccuracies arising from ignorance of his subject, the well-informed speaker is full of self-confidence. And the fact does not escape the audience, who listen with the respect due to the expert.

THE INSPIRED SPEAKER

The speaker who is saturated with his subject is, as a rule, prepared to speak very largely extemporaneously, and it is always an excellent thing for a speaker to get away from a prepared and set form of words. Not infrequently one sees a good speaker, well versed in his subject, thrust away his notes and carry on *extempore*. He is fired with his subject and away he goes, carrying his audience with him.

Not so the ill-informed speaker, treating a subject with which he is but superficially acquainted. Laboriously he recalls the few points he has got together for the occasion — unblushingly he deals in irrelevancies, dragging in feeble anecdotes which usually have nothing to do with the case.

TALK ONLY ON WHAT YOU KNOW

It is of paramount importance for the newcomer to public speaking to choose a subject on which he or she is exceptionally well informed. Nothing like the same difficulty will be experienced in finding the words with which to clothe your thoughts

if you have real knowledge of your subject. If you haven't that real knowledge you have no right to inflict your remarks upon an audience. You may — and must — be prepared to answer questions.

Men who in the ordinary way are painfully tongue-tied become positively fluent if you get them on the subject of their work or their hobbies. They know their subject, that is why. So "know the Party case" is the first golden rule.

KEEP TO THE POINT.

This second fundamental of forceful public speaking is also "obvious." But how small a proportion of speakers really stick to the point!

Discursiveness is the bane of many otherwise good speakers. The fault invariably arises from lack of mental discipline. It is often the best-informed speakers who are most guilty of it. They have a wealth of ideas, but fail to discriminate between what is relevant and what is not. They have no mental plan, and allow themselves to digress and wander farther and farther from the point, all the time consuming valuable minutes. It is not unusual for such speakers to leave unsaid many important things for the simple reason that they have squandered their time in digressive excursion away from the point.

It is the ever-present necessity of avoiding irrelevancies, which clog the flow of argument and tend to introduce confusing elements, that makes it imperative to work to a carefully prepared plan. The method of preparing notes that will be advocated in a further article should be found very useful in this connection. If one has a definite journey clearly mapped out, touching all essentials, one is not in anything like the same degree likely to wander where one has no immediate business.

But in speaking, what is said is said, and irrelevancies uttered have taken time needed for what is relevant and important. Moreover, a speaker who is continually leaving his main theme to follow non-essential lines of argument will find difficulty in holding the attention of his audience, and almost certainly fail to be convincing.

HOW TO CHECK IRRELEVANCY.

The same procedure can be followed in overcoming a tendency to indulge in irrelevancies in speaking, as for remedying the fault in writing. The secret lies in clear thinking beforehand, and the surest aid to clear thinking is the method of note-taking to be described later.

The speaker who has contracted the disease of irrelevance, or who wishes to avoid contracting it, should compile his notes with scrupulous care, afterwards compressing them into the smallest compass of words that is compatible with continuity and logic of presentation.

It is best at first to speak direct from these notes which, in spite of the compression referred to, are certain to be

much fuller than a good speaker's notes should be. But if they are set out, reference to them should not be made obvious by the time taken to find the next point. As experience is gained and confidence is in process of being established, the notes can become briefer and fewer.

However, the reduction of notes should be attended by no diminution of the newly acquired ability to stick rigidly to the point. If it is, then it is dangerous to continue doing with fewer and fewer notes — for the time being, at any rate.

KNOW WHEN TO STOP.

Excellent advice in small compass. Carlyle said: "There is an endless merit in a man knowing when to have done." Many speakers deliver a good address, and then spoil everything by not knowing when to stop. They go on repeating, and sometimes contradicting, themselves, tail off dismally, sit down — ten or fifteen minutes after they should have done.

Every speech worthy of the name has had hard work put into its preparation. If the ideas have been logically arranged, they have been worked up to a carefully conceived climax. Perhaps when that point is reached the speaker has got well into his stride and feels he has his audience with him. He gives way to the temptation to "carry on." But because his carefully worked-up climax has been reached and passed, whatever follows must be in the nature of an anti-climax, and the interest roused in the audience cannot be sustained. The speaker has gone up like a rocket and is now coming down like a damp squib.

The quick curtain—finish your speech on a high note. Work up to it all the time you are speaking, reach it, strike it hard and sit down. The "quick curtain" to a short story is wonderfully effective. Have a quick curtain to your speech.

TALK TO THE MAN AT THE BACK.

The mumbling, word-swallowing speaker can never be called effective. I know of nothing more depressing than the speaker who pitches his voice in a sort of minor key and confines his remarks to the first two rows. Don't talk to the water-bottle or to your notes. Hold up your head and talk to the Man at the Back.

Remember always that you interest only that part of the audience which can hear you. If some of the audience is fidgeting it is a sure sign that they *can't* hear you.

And an audience which is half interested, half fidgety and recalcitrant, is a very difficult one to keep in order.

I hope to say something later about clearness of diction. R. AMBRIDGE.

These notes will be continued in future issues of FORUM.

NEXT MONTH :

A Review of

"James Maxton—The Beloved Rebel"

and

A Reply to "The Colour Question"

Correspondence

A SOCIALIST'S LIFETIME

Dear Comrades,

Mother and I wish to offer our sincere thanks for the fine tribute paid to Father by Harry Young in June's *Socialist Standard* and for the sympathy shown towards us and my sisters in our sad loss.

In the years he was more intimately connected with the party he was, of course, still known as Glucksberg. Although he actually dropped this name in favour of our present one to help sell the cakes he baked opposite the Fascist H.Q. in Bethnal Green, he liked in later years to joke that it was changed so that there was no chance of our being confused with the Greek royal family!

Mention of the Fascists brings to mind many anecdotes about his erstwhile neighbours. He, as well as they, frequented the same little Italian "caff" and so, unlike other people of his background, would vigorously counter their squalid philosophy with Socialist reason and humanity. The result, if not conversion, was that he came to be the only Jew in the area not to be molested in any way by them. To their remark that "you're different, it's the others," he would plead with them not to let him remain alone with savages such as they when their gas chambers were brought into operation.

At this time he had recently seen both Pilsudskian and Hitlerian Fascism in action. Having worked day and night almost to the point of nervous breakdown, Mother sacrificed her own much-needed pleasures to enable him to achieve his life-long ambition. It was to visit the scene of his birth; that mysterious place whose sufferings had impelled his Parents and hundreds of thousands like them to seek a better, freer life in the West, and yet the memory of which, as it became blurred over the years, was almost hallowed. My Grandmother always spoke of "the Heim" in bated breath.

On the other bank of the Vistula, away from the noble palaces that had once reverberated to the sound of Chopin, he found his poverty-stricken relatives. They, not unlike some party members who used to confuse clean fingernails with "Capitalist riches," regarded him as the rich Saviour from the gold-paved streets of London. When he saw a benign and bearded Jewish patriarch repeatedly putting up the shutters of his crumbling shop without making the slightest protest as young hooligans just as repeatedly knocked them down, Father was incensed. His cousin had to plead with him to move on and take no notice lest he should provoke a pogrom. More poverty and more relations were to be found in Lodz, centre

of Poland's textile industry. A promising violinist cousin too, unable to study at the Conservatoire as the Jewish quota had been filled. And Bundists, with whom, with the Yiddish language in common, he could discuss their non-Zionism and their claim that the solution of the Jewish problem was inseparable from the solution of all others thrown up by Capitalism; a viewpoint so close to our own but severely handicapped by their adherence to Social-democratic reformist ideas. Of the few who were later to escape Nazi extermination by escaping to Russia, many suffered the fate of the early Bolsheviks.

Father's warmest memories of this journey were of his days in Vienna. Before going, various members had suggested he look up a very dear Comrade, silent for some time past. He carried with him this Comrade's last known address. He was not at this address but would be at another, said the occupant. He was not there either but the fishmonger was sure to know. He didn't but the newspaper boy did. Mustering his best German, Father knocked at the door of one of Vienna's pioneer Council-flats and asked, "Wohnt heir Herr R.?" "Why, I know you from the Herald League days," was the answer of R's wife who years before had taught at the Finsbury Socialist Sunday School. Discreetly concealed under the bed were piles of Socialist classics and current pamphlets. Here was an oasis in the Central-European desert from which we appeared as a large organization.

In later years he was to do more ambassadorial work for the Party. At the beginning of the War he had joined a firm of frozen-egg importers from China

whence many of the eggs for industrial use were formerly obtained. Then Shanghai was occupied by the Japanese and the Ministry of Food had to seek alternative sources of supply. It was decided that Argentina was most suitable for developments on these lines and he was sent there to build a dehydration plant. With elementary schooling only and Finsbury Park as his University this was a formidable task. By dint of Herculean efforts of studying production methods, refrigeration theory, drying processes and of course Spanish, he not only built the most modern factory of its kind but became an acknowledged authority in this field, being embarrassingly referred to as "Dr. Grant" when visiting McGill University, Montreal.

To be on the River Plate was to suffer from all the corruption one associates with such places and to live in a summer climate akin to a Turkish bath. Those years lay heavily upon him and were the root-cause of his subsequent ill health. He was also unhappy at being far away from the family, an institution that he always felt was underrated in Party circles.

For all that the name Grant was chosen by sticking the proverbial pin in a telephone directory, he was made an honorary member of the Buenos Aires Burns Society on his own merits. He loved poetry and would often recite to me Swinburne's *Hertha*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and poems of that calibre and he loved music too.

As far as I know, he never spoke from the Party platform or even felt able to write in the manner required for the *Standard*, masterly writer though he was.

His contribution to the ultimate Socialism was of a less tangible kind. With his very wide experience of men and places he was brilliantly capable, as Harry Young suggests, to interpret events and trends. By his personal generosity to individual Socialists who needed a helping hand he must have enabled several to stand on their feet again and get back to party work.

Towards the end he needed a climate such as he had known in his youth in South Africa. But Malan was hardly likely to welcome him, even though it was General Smuts, then a Colonel, who sentenced him to three months' hard labour for "advocating insurrection." By this was meant he was involved in a curious situation where white workers, fired by the events in Russia, made a futile attempt to set up a "White Workers' Republic." Father's contribution to the "insurrection" was to state the classic Party case from the steps of Johannesburg City Hall. The Police were unappreciative of the subtleties of outlook amongst workers and he suffered the common fate. This was the period when mass "Mass-meetings" of Cape Town workers were called to protest at the Authorities' refusal to allow Moses Baritz to set foot ashore.

The untimeliness of his death is even greater than was suggested in the obituary, since he was only just 54 and not 55 as stated. I here disregard the passport age of 53 which resulted from Grandfather's determination that no son of his would participate in the First World War.

Cordially yours,

EDWARD S. GRANT.

St. Pancras.

"The Socialist Movement"

This article was received as an open letter to the authors of "The Socialist Movement: A Re-examination". We have not published criticisms of that article because the authors are not in a position to reply. We make this exception because we think that special interest may attach to an American viewpoint.—EDITORS.

The great thought that has gone into this article is obvious, but it seems to me that you have lost sight of the general panorama of modern capitalism because of your enthusiasms for the incipient socialism you observe taking place. You have become so beguiled by the alluring trees that you don't see the putrifying forest.

Here's how I observe these same incipient socialism developments: If you want to see evidence that socialism is practical and possible today, see what modern capitalism is compelled to do in order to function. With all the "socialist" aspects of highly developed capitalism, it has not and cannot do away with the private property aspects of its inherent relationships. The very transformation of capitalist private property forms from owners, intimately and directly associated with

products and their production, into the gigantic private property forms of today, which are more or less typified by varying aspects of state capitalism and absentee ownership describes the process satisfactorily enough. Especially note that state ownership as well as cartels, monopolies, huge corporations and other highly socialised *appearances* of ownership are but factors of a system in which the proceeds of that society (surplus value, in the last instance) belong to the "eaters" of surplus value. What I would emphasize from the observations of incipient socialism that you stress is that here is evidence that men are social beings and can co-operate in their common interests. Even in capitalism, observe how human beings can function. More particularly, we see increasing demonstrations that the highly developed technologies, the tremendous productive processes, the shrunken globe, the present day problems of management needs, efficient production, bring into being introductions of vast social measures. Most important, we see the conclusive proof, as it were, that the change from capitalism into socialism is a relatively simple matter, rather

than requiring intricate, complex involved measures. In fact, haven't we always maintained that if mankind were confronted with the problems of production, such as inability to satisfy the needs of mankind, the conditions would not be ripe for socialism. The evolutionary changes laying the groundwork for socialism have taken place within capitalism.

IDENTIFICATION "WITH"

There are two key words in your article that illustrate my criticism of your statement. At the close of Section I, you say, "... we can make people SEE that this is the general and significant direction of social change." I could wholeheartedly agree with this view, i.e., the identification of incipient socialist developments taking place today. However, quite a different attitude is presented in the concluding paragraph of your joint statement. There you urge "identifying WITH society's incipient socialism." If words have meaning, it appears to me that you actually propose, in essence, that we participate in the administration of capitalism. To identify WITH can only mean, in my book, becoming associated with these measures in

an active, direct fashion. What becomes of our socialist responsibility as social scientists to study these developments, draw the significant lessons, and arouse our fellow workers and fellow humans, for that matter, to understand and then act? Look now, by "plugging their socialist-leaning element," aren't we rationalizing and condoning the *status quo* and even justifying the glowing apologetics of those who prate on the virtues of capitalism?

Capitalism must, by the compulsion of necessity, introduce these "socialist-leaning" measures for its own needs and functioning, whether for better or for worse. It has become too gigantic to be operated otherwise. There is no need for our active participation except, of course, as individuals making a livelihood in this society being compelled to sell our commodity, labor power, in the market.

I certainly do not want to do you any injustice to your viewpoint. If I misconstrue your meaning of "identify WITH" please clarify it for me.

SNOWBALL VS AVALANCHE

You contrast two quotes from Comrade Gilmac and myself as though one were an "avalanche" and the other a "snowball" approach. Gilmac's article in FORUM had for its theme that there was taking place in the heads of the workers a gradual evolution of ideas which also "involved the co-operation of everybody" for the change of society. He depreciated the gradualism based upon an assumed co-existence, as it were, of a partial socialist and a partial capitalist society; what is sometimes referred to as a mixed economy. The conditions propitious for socialism and making socialism mandatory include the "socialist-leaning" aspects of capitalism. I'm sure that Comrade Gilmac would not over simplify the transformation of capitalism into socialism by saying that on one Friday at 2.15 p.m., we had capitalism and presto, one minute later at 2.16 p.m., socialism was introduced via an avalanche. Comrade Gilmac is fully aware that the seed of socialism is fertilised within the womb of capitalism and after a period of gestation, the new society is born. The essential core of the process is that the *predominant* social relations of capitalism give way to the *predominant* social relations of socialism. As for me, personally, I lean very heavily to the view that it will be a very brief and a very simple matter. Not only are the conditions NOW over-ripe for socialism, but the only stumbling block I see on the horizon is the lack of a socialist conscious majority. That was the point of my statement that you quoted. Project yourself into the circumstances of a 20% minority and you easily visualize the behaviour of those in control and the concessions they would offer. The momentum and geometric

growth from a 20% minority to overwhelming, stirring, enthusiastic, inspired majorities staggers the imagination. To me this is but a short step. The mechanism or *modus operandi* of the socialist change presumes the socialist consciousness and socialist majority rather than the participation in "socialist-learning" measures. The only validity I see of the terms snowball and avalanche are as descriptions of capitalism and socialist transformation. Capitalism is the snowball, and the socialist revolution is the avalanche.

SOCIALIST FERMENT

It is your contention that our task has become that of encouraging and accelerating the incipient socialism process taking place today by identifying ourselves with it. It raises the question: for what object? The answer, of course, you give is to "precipitate" socialism. Aside from the criticisms above, it presupposes the ideas of mankind are not affected by the very developments themselves. Is it possible you are not aware that man is, also, a thinking animal, affected by his environments? Are you not aware that, imperceptibly and unwittingly, in response to the very incipient socialism you observe, a ferment goes on in the backs of everybody's head? It makes what had been taken for granted quite questionable. Formerly held ideas are transformed from being reasonable and rational into their very opposite. This ferment of ideas results in crystallizing socialist viewpoints. In a sense, this is the real strength of socialism. Science, truth, necessity are all on the side of socialism.

EQUALITY

You "emphasise" efforts at equalitarian, co-operative endeavours "as contribution to socialism." Aside from the capitalist limitations (*and what limitations they are*) that you have recognized yourselves in the article, there is another aspect, it appears to me, that you are overlooking. We have no need for training men or encouraging men to behave socially. That is the ever-normal behavior of homo sapiens, even in property societies. For an outstanding contribution to the soundness and validity of this social phenomenon I highly recommend a new study that has just now been published (1955), *The Direction of Human Development, Biological and Social Bases* by M. F. Ashley Montagu, published by Harper and Brothers, New York. It is a valuable, scientific contribution that shows the basic co-operative nature of Man. The book's documentations, its footnotes, appendices, and comprehensive bibliography make it a MUST in every socialist library. Montagu is not a socialist, and we would quarrel with some of his points, but he is a scientist in this field. (Incidentally, this work illustrates the point that I was making on the latest strength of socialism

and the ferment at work.) I can't help noting another illustration of the fallacy of your reasoning on this point. The transformation of backward areas into a predominant socialist society doesn't require vast changes in their social behaviors. The vestiges of early communal existence have never been completely uprooted.

It is an illusion to imagine that we must actively work for the "furtherance of human co-operation." If anything, what we must work for is to help speedily inaugurate favourable environments where human co-operation can really function. I fear that you are confusing the efficient harnessing by highly developed capitalism via the utilisation of man's gregariousness and sociability with manifestations of growing "equality."

CONCLUSION

You correctly state that "the Party . . . must apply itself to the presentation of socialism as a science and as a way of life." However, "encouraging the growth of socialist tendencies in attitudes and institutions" by "identifying WITH" the "incipient socialism" mistakes the function of socialists today. Our task is primarily that of arousing socialist knowledge and understanding, i.e., consciousness, on the basis of evidence and unfolding events, that capitalism has outlived its historic usefulness and is now ripe for burial; that socialism is no fanciful utopia, but the crying need of the times; and that we, as socialists, are catalytic agents, acting on our fellow workers and all others to do something about it as speedily as possible.

I. RAB

(Continued from page 149)

development from this time onward; that will be done, in fact, in the articles to come in this series. Such a course is not possible with Spanish literature. After the high-water mark of the age just discussed, it becomes an enfeebled trickle — a collection of undistinguished names scarcely known in Spain itself. Consider this along with the historical facts. Two powers struggling for the lordship of the seas. One is triumphant: its economy and its culture lead the world. The other, defeated, sinks back into mediaevalism supervised by absentee landlords and the angry Church. Mercantile capitalism was the tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, led on to fortune — the fortune, economic and cultural, of industrial capitalism. But not otherwise.

R. COSTER.

NOTE: The quotation by G. A. Borgese, who died in 1952, is taken from an essay on Dante and his work published as Introduction to an American edition of *The Divine Comedy*. For those especially interested in the Elizabethan coney-catchers, there is an excellent chapter on the subject in Charles Whibley's *Literary Studies*.